

Banjade, A. (2006 June). Voice to the voiceless in Western Nepal: An audience survey of Community Radio Madanpokhara. *The Journal of Development Communication*. Volume 17 (1): 72-91.

VOICE TO THE VOICELESS IN WESTERN NEPAL: AN AUDIENCE SURVEY OF COMMUNITY RADIO MADANPOKHAR

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Community radio has many names and operates with different objectives throughout the world. Some community radio stations are oppositional broadcasters, anti-establishment activists working at the local level, while others are run by people without a particular political agenda in order to serve people with a humanitarian and grass-roots development motive. There are radio stations that serve local minority language populations, and special interest groups, and so on. Furthermore, community radio stations are operated either by particular geographic communities, or by communities organized around specific interests such as religion, special interest groups, etc. Community radio offers a model that is very grass-root, and very democratic. It provides access to information to the marginalized section of the population and gives a voice to the voiceless and serves as the mouthpiece of oppressed people and the tool for development. Bruce Girard (1992: ix) has provided one of the best descriptions of community radio:

‘The study revealed that the media use (listening to radio and watching television) was not homogeneous across people living in city and their counterparts in villages as well as among people from different caste/ethnic origins. Listening to the radio was universal in the city whereas almost 15 percent people in villages reported not listening to a radio.’

Community radio (is) a type of radio made to serve people; radio that encourages expression and participation and that values local culture. Its purpose is to give a voice to those without voices, to marginalized groups and to communities far from large urban centers, where the population is too small to attract commercial or large-scale station radio.

The major objectives of community radio are to “encourage widespread community participation in broadcasting, provide an opportunity for horizontal communication between individuals and groups in the community, stimulate more free and open debate of community issues and reflect the cultural and social diversity of the community” (White, 1990). People, if given the opportunity, can acquire the appropriate knowledge and gain the ability to determine the course of their own lives. This develops the sense of self-confidence and empowerment that can be “looked at as a positive,

holistic outcome of self- discovery, successful human interaction, and the ability to dialogue with people different from one's self" (White, 1994). Community radio has distinct features that make it different from the public service broadcasting and commercial radio stations. Community radio does not share the narrow attitude of public service radio. Unlike commercial and public service radio, which treat listeners as objects to be captured for advertisers or to be informed, community radio treats its listeners as subjects and active participants in every stages of the stations (Lewis & Booth, 1989).

Community radio stations in Nepal, including *Community Radio Madanpokhara*, have achieved some degree of success. The UNESCO's recognition of *Community Radio Madanpokhara* as one of the five most outstanding rural communication projects for its Rural Communication Prize 2003 demonstrates this fact. As Tom Church, who worked at research office of Corporation for Public Broadcasting in 1976, wrote, "while non-commercial stations may define success in more esoteric terms than profit, the bottom line for all radio stations is that a mission... cannot be achieved if there are no listeners" (as quoted in Stavitsky, 1995).

Obviously, like other community media, success of such media is discussed in terms of the process through which the marginalized sections of the population get access to information and in terms of how relevant the programs and messages to their community members are. Community Radio Madanpokhara aims to bring about positive change through people's participation and producing and airing programs that are pro-people. Nonetheless, as Church suggested, the objectives, however good they may be, cannot be achieved if the people whom they were intended for do not listen to the radio programs. Thus, this paper explores the answer to the question - Does CRM provide a greater access to its community members?

Background

The radio set is believed to have entered Nepal as early as the mid-1920s. However, it was limited to the Prime Minister and his cabinet members, the Royal family members and their close allies. By early 1940s, a limited number of civilians also owned radio sets. But the government collected the radio sets owned by the members of the civilian population during World War II, in order to prevent the public from listening to the war news, and returned them to their owners only in 1946. In 1950, the Nepali Congress Party, which was fighting to overthrow the Rana regime and establish democracy in the nation, had established a radio station. First started in Bhojpur district in eastern Nepal, it was later moved to the south-eastern town of Biratnagar and finally to Kathmandu where it eventually evolved into the state-owned Radio Nepal with a 250 KW transmitter in 1951.

The development of media that started 1951, during the first democratic political environment, was halted after King Mahendra dissolved the elected parliament and took over power in 1961. The development of media resumed – after a 30-year hibernation period – when the popular movement of 1990 restored multiparty democracy in Nepal and the Nepali Congress came into power in 1991. The Nepali Congress government introduced the National Communication Policy of 1992, the Broadcasting Act of 1993

and the National Broadcasting Regulations of 1995 which together totally changed and gave a positive direction to the media landscape of Nepal, allowing for the independent broadcasting of communication media in the nation.

Nepal became the first country in South Asia to grant a license for independent radio broadcasting in 1997. Breaking the monopoly of the state-run Radio Nepal, *Radio Sagarmatha* [*Sagarmatha* is the Nepali name for Mount Everest] became the first independent radio broadcasting in South Asia in 1997. Along with the establishment of other independent radio stations, *Community Radio Madanpokhara* became the first community radio station to be established and operated in rural Nepal. As of May 2006, there were 56 licensed FM stations (16 of them are community radio stations) in Nepal with 46 of them on the air. Besides, there are reports that the Maoists, who have been fighting against the establishment since 1996 to make Nepal a republic state, have been using mobile FM radio stations to get their messages across, especially to their supports and the general public.

Nepalese media, including community and commercial FM radio stations, had to suffer from the intimidation from the king's dictatorship since February 1, 2005 until April 26, 2006. The government under the royal rule granted a license to Nepalese Army (formally known as Royal Nepalese Army until the famous Proclamations of House of Representative of May 18, 2006 that curtailed the king's power) to operate 10 FM radio stations in order to "counter the Maoists propaganda." Although the new government put in power from the popular uprising scraped most of the draconian policies of the king's government, it has not yet cancelled the military's license to operate FM radio stations.

Community radio certainly increases people's level of access to information. Radio Nepal, the state-owned and run broadcasting, was the only radio station operating in the nation before 1997. Most rural villages in Nepal remain un-served or underserved by the mainstream media. The national newspapers are not accessible to the majority of the people, especially to those in the rural villages, because of formidable barriers of illiteracy and a lack of adequate transportation facilities. Nineteen of the 75 districts in Nepal did not have any locally published newspaper in 2002 (Regmi & Kharel, 2002). Even though there are newspapers published in the country, these, as Koirala argued in 2002, "deal predominantly with politics, are targeted at the urban elites, use difficult *Sanskritized* language, and contain very little material of educational value for the masses of people and are, therefore, of little relevance to the bulk of the population" (Koirala, 2002).

Similarly, television in Nepal is not accessible to most people because only 15% of the population has access to electricity, and most people cannot afford television sets. Besides, television in Nepal, accessible and affordable to not more than 10 percent of the population, was until very recently a wholly state-owned monopoly. *Nepal Television*, the state-run TV, has been "nothing more than an ugly tool of downright political propaganda" (Sharma, 1999, August 4). In contrast, the broadcast of *Radio Nepal* – also a state-owned entity – reaches a large number of people in Nepal. Radio sets, powered by batteries, are relatively inexpensive and the production cost of the radio programs is not exorbitant. However, *Radio Nepal* lacks credibility, and "it has all along been an unabashed tool for political propaganda for the powers-that-be" (Sharma, 1999, August

4). Besides, since the programs at *Radio Nepal* are centrally produced by professionals in Kathmandu, these programs have little relevance to the rural masses (Koirala, 2002).

Furthermore, the mainstream media in Nepal is, to a large extent, irrelevant to the concerns of the common people because it is controlled and run by the state, political parties and Kathmandu's ruling elite, "who in reality have forged a hand-in-glove relationship instead of an adversarial one" (Sharma, 1999). Community media, therefore, could be an effective, credible, cheap and accountable media in Nepal.

Nepal experienced changes in the media landscape after the popular movement of 1990, which transformed the non-party system into a parliamentary democratic political system. Economic liberalization/privatization in Nepal resulted in increased investment in and development of private media as well as initiatives regarding community media. Although the Nepalese laws and regulations do not make any distinction among commercial and community radio stations, there are 16 (as of May 2006) self-declared community radio stations operating in different parts of the country. CRM is among the community radio stations in the country that have shown some degree of success in terms of providing a greater access to its community members.

The history of radio broadcasting in Palpa district in mid-western Nepal can be traced back to the 1960s when Buddha Ratna Shakya, for the first time in Nepal, conducted an experiment of broadcasting an AM radio in Tansen, Palpa. However, it remained an experiment and could not be further developed. Much later and relatively recently, in 1997, mothers' clubs and women organizations of Palpa were the first ones in Nepal to experiment with a mobile audio tower in seven village development committees of the district, including in Madanpokhara in the Madi Valley. The initiative was successful in terms voicing the women's issues and having it heard and in encouraging others in different parts of the country to follow suit. Besides, the experience was helpful in the establishment of CRM and some of the pioneering activists for the audio tower later joined CRM.

Community Radio Madanpokhara has been on air since 5 April 2000 on FM 106.9 MHz. With the slogan "Communication for Development," CRM has been producing and broadcasting programs that are important to its community members since the very beginning. The license is held by Madanpokhara Village Development Committee (VDC¹), which appoints a station manager and a board of directors. The station is located in the small village of Madanpokhara, some 300 km west from Kathmandu, with a population of slightly more than six thousand. It is about 12 km from Tansen municipality, the district headquarter of Palpa and is home to approximately 20 thousand people. Using a 100-watt transmitter, a group of 14 volunteers produces and broadcasts 12.5 hours of daily programs on air to a potential audience of 700,000 in the surrounding rural and semi-urban areas.

As the first village-based radio station in Nepal, CRM has been giving priority to local events, local news, local problems and issues that are important for the development of local communities. CRM broadcasts the locally produced programs in local voices that are familiar to the public. CRM's programs have gained popularity and a growing number of people in the region tune-in to CRM to be informed of what is going on in their neighborhoods. Besides its own programs, CRM transmits programs (*Kayakiran*, for

example) produced by independent media organizations like Communication Corner in Lalitpur, a municipality in the valley where Kathmandu the capital is also located. On February 1, 2005, King Gynendra sacked the government and took control of power. The king's government started intimidation of the press by introducing a new media ordinance. The government under the king's leadership had banned the transmitting of any program produced by such independent media organizations. Besides, the government had also clamped down on the broadcasting of news from all FM radio stations in the nation. The government already scraped the king's policies including the draconic media ordinance and the Nepalese media now operating in free environment again.

Research Design

Community Radio Madanpokhara is located in Madanpokhara VDC and its broadcast reaches most of the 66 VDCs in Palpa as well as some parts of near-by Arghakhanchi, Gulmi, Parbat and Syangja districts. However, at the time of the survey, CRM considered Tansen municipality and the 15 VDCs included in the survey as its community and maintained a radio representative in each VDC and in the municipality. Thus, the audience survey included Tansen municipality (city) with a population of 20,000 and 15 Village Development Committees (VDCs) with a combined population of more than 56,000. The survey conducted in January 2004 included 690 families and yielded 676 valid responses. The selection of the respondents followed the following steps:

1. Six hundred and ninety (690) households were assigned to 15 VDCs and Tansen municipality based on their population proportion to size.
2. Two wards were randomly selected from each VDC (out of 9 wards) and from Tansen municipality (out of 14 wards) and the assigned numbers of households were chosen from the selected wards.
3. Within the selected wards, a list of households was created updating the existing list available at the VDC office and at the Tansen Municipality Office. The assigned numbers of households were selected randomly using random start and sampling distance.
4. Within the selected family, the individuals aged 10 years and above were identified and one individual was randomly selected for the interview.

Interviewers and respondents

All the 16 interviewers were radio representatives of CRM. Two of them were female. They were teachers, government employee, students and local shopkeepers serving as a radio representative for *Community Radio Madanpokhara*. Their respective VDCs or municipality appointed them as radio representative and they worked as a reporter for the region. The radio representatives were selected for the fieldwork because: (1) It was cost effective to hire local people rather than bringing in field workers from outside. Besides, the radio representatives worked with minimum monetary incentives. (2) Since all of the radio representatives worked in their respective village and were familiar with the situation, it reduced any possible security threat from the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. (3)

The population included a significantly larger proportion of ethnic groups (Magar for example) and the radio representatives for such villages were from the same ethnic groups so they did not have or face any language and cultural problem. (4) The survey provided a good experience for the radio representatives that helped in the capacity building of CRM.

Selecting radio representatives for the data collection has downside as well. The radio representatives are familiar among their community members and have been known of their role as the reporter for CRM for the region. It is possible for the respondents to respond in favor of CRM when their radio representative asks about their media habits. There is also a possibility of biasness in favor of CRM from the radio representatives when recording the responses. Thus, one should keep this in mind when looking at the findings.

Although cast-based discrimination has been outlawed officially, it remains common in practice in Nepal. The caste system divides people into four primary social classifications (varnas) from higher to lower: the Brahmin or Bahun (the learned, priest), the Kshatriya or Chhetri (the warrior, administrator, army), the Vaishya (the merchant or trader), the Shudra (the laborer). There are hundreds of sub-castes within these castes. There are many castes in Nepal that do not fall into any of the above categories and identify themselves with their ethnicity instead. This study, based on the castes/ethnicity found in the survey areas, analyzed demographic information under the categories of Brahmin, Chhetri, Newar, Magar, and lower caste. Newar has been kept as a separate group since it has been classified in Chhetri as well as Vaishya. Similarly, some classify Magar as Shudra and others consider it as an ethnic group. The study area has a high proportion of Magar population and it has been kept separately. The lower cast here includes occupational castes such as Kami or blacksmith, Sarki or leather worker, Damai or tailors, Sunar or Goldsmith, etc. Members of a higher cast enjoy more wealth and opportunities as compared to the lower cast people who haven been in hard labor works.

Since the number of households selected was based on the population size, a high percent (25.9%) of respondents in the sample came from Tansen municipality. The distribution of the respondents by their ethnic origin indicated that the highest percent of them were Magars (43.3%), followed by Brahmins (28.8%), lower-caste people (12.4%) and Chhetris (9.6%). In the sample, 55 percent of the respondents were males whereas only 45 percent of them were females. Almost all of the respondents from lower-cast families (88%) and of the Brahmins (97.9%) reported Nepali as their language whereas a high percent of Newars (57.1%) and Magars (54.9%) reported non-Nepali as their language.

Access to media

Since access to media largely depended upon the family owning the reception technology, this study considered a family owning a radio set and a TV set as having access to those media. The audience survey included whether or not the respondent or her/his family owns a radio set (with and without FM reception), a television set and a VCR. Since only a very few families reported having a VCR, it was dropped from the

analysis. Furthermore, the Internet was not included in the survey since it was accessible only through a couple of cyber cafes in the Tansen municipality. Although the focus of the study was CRM, this study provides a reference regarding the ownership and viewers of television in the region in order to provide a better picture about the access to information of the concerned population.

The findings of the survey indicated that the access to media was not even among the different segments of the population. It varied between the people living in villages and in the city as well as among people from different caste/ethnic backgrounds. Access to all types of media (radio, FM radio and TV) was higher in the city, as expected, than in villages. Although the access to each medium was higher in the city, the difference was wider in terms of the access to television.

Not everyone who has a radio has one with a FM reception. Overall, 86.7 percent of the families reported owning a radio set whereas FM radio was accessible only to 77.2 percent of families. About 43 percent of families in the survey area had a TV set. A higher percent of families in the city had access to a radio (98.3%) than their counterparts living in villages (82.6%).

The survey indicated differences among various caste/ethnic groups in terms of the proportion of families owning a radio set. All the Newar families owned a radio set followed by a high percent of Brahmins (96.9%), Chhetris (86.2%) and Magars (82.9%) and a relatively lower percent of lower-cast families (72.6%). In general, a higher percent of families in the city than in villages own a radio set. Although this was true for all the ethnic groups, there was not much difference in terms of their access to a radio set among Brahmin and Newar families living in villages and in the city. However, a higher percent of Chhetri, Magar and lower-cast families in the city had access to a radio than their counterparts in villages.

Table: 1
Access to a radio set and a TV set in families living in the city and villages as well as among different caste/ethnic groups in Palpa district, 2004

	Caste/Ethnic groups						Total
	Brahmin	Chhetri	Magar	Newar	Lower cast	Others	
Families with a radio set							
Village	95.9	79.5	81.8	100.0	69.9	0.0	82.6
City	97.9	100.0	100.0	100.0	90.9	100.0	98.3
Total	96.9	86.2	82.9	100.0	72.6	81.8	86.7
Families with a FM radio							
Village	92.9	75.0	72.4	88.9	57.5	0.0	74.5
City	86.6	71.4	94.4	89.5	81.8	77.8	85.1
Total	89.7	73.8	73.7	89.3	60.7	63.6	77.2
Families with a TV							
Villages	66.3	47.7	15.6	33.3	19.2	--	29.1
City	81.4	81.0	72.2	94.7	90.9	88.9	70.9
Total	73.8	58.5	19.1	75.0	28.6	72.7	43.0

Source: Baseline Audience Survey of Community Radio Madanpokhara, 2004

Since FM radio was introduced into Nepal not too many years ago, most of the radio sets before that came without FM reception. Although there are a couple of service centers in Tansen, Palpa, which can add reception capacity in existing radio sets, people prefer to buy a new set rather than upgrading the old one. Moreover, the difference in cost in adding a FM band and buying a new FM radio set is not very much. In the survey area, 77.2 percent of households had at least one radio set with FM reception capability. A higher percent of families in the city had at least one FM radio (85.1%) than their counterparts living in villages (74.5%).

The study indicated differences in term of the families' owing a FM radio among caste/ethnic groups. The percent of families owing a FM radio was below the average (77.2%) in Magar (73.3%) and Chhetri (72.7%) families. Almost 90 percent of the Brahmin and Newar families had at least one FM radio whereas only 60.7 percent of the lower-cast families had it. Furthermore, there were differences between families of the same ethnic origin living in villages and living in the city in terms of owing a FM radio. In general, a higher percent of families in the city owe a radio set. However, a higher percent of Brahmin and Chhetri families living in villages owe a FM radio than their counterparts in the city. This could be due to the shift towards TV among the Brahmin and Chhetri families in the city. On the other hand, a higher percent of Magar and lower-cast families in the city owe a FM radio than their counterparts living in villages whereas almost equal proportions of Newars in villages and in the city had a FM radio at home.

Similarly, 43.0 percent of households in the survey area reported owing a TV set. A relatively very high percent of households in the city had a TV (70.9%) as compared to their counterparts living in villages (29.1%). The access to electricity and the families' affordability for a TV set among other factors may have contributed to this very significant difference. Only 66.1 percent of the families in the villages reported having access to electricity as compared to 97.1% of their counterparts in the city (not shown in table).

When examining the access to TV according to caste/ethnic origin, there were differences among various ethnic groups. A high percent of Newar (75.0%) and Brahmin (73.8%) families had a TV, followed by Chhetri (58.5%). However, only 28.6 percent of lower-cast families and only 19.1 percent of Magar families had a TV. Furthermore, TV ownership was different among families from all the different ethnic groups living in villages and in the city. A relatively higher percent of households in the city had a TV than their counterparts in villages. Almost 95 percent of Newar families in the city had access to TV whereas only one-third (33.3%) of their counterparts living in villages had access to it. Similarly, higher than 90 percent of the lower-cast families in the city had access to TV against less than 20 percent of their counterparts in villages.

Media Use

The study revealed that the media use (listening to radio and watching television) was not homogeneous across people living in city and their counterparts in villages as well as among people from different caste/ethnic origins. Listening to the radio was universal in the city whereas almost 15 percent people in villages reported not listening to a radio.

Table: 2
Listening to radio by the respondents living in the city and villages as well as among different caste/ethnic groups in Palpa district, 2004

	Caste/Ethnic groups						Total
	Brahmin	Chhetri	Magar	Newar	Lower cast	Others	
Listening to radio							
Village	94.9	88.6	84.7	100.0	80.8	100.0	86.4
City	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total	97.4	92.3	85.7	100.0	83.3	81.8	89.9
Listening to FM radio							
Village	96.9	81.8	68.7	100.0	71.2	0.0	76.0
City	92.8	90.5	94.4	100.0	100.0	100.0	94.3
Total	94.9	84.6	70.3	100.0	75.0	81.8	80.8
Listening to FM radio							
Access to FM	97.1 (170)	95.8 (46)	84.3 (182)	100.0 (25)	90.2 (46)	100.0 (7)	91.2 (476)
Without FM	75.0 (15)	52.9 (9)	31.2 (24)	--	51.5 (17)	--	45.5 (70)
Listening to FM radio							
Below 20	95.9	66.7	81.2	100.0	90.5	100.0	86.1
20-40 years	93.8	76.9	68.7	100.0	70.3	100.0	79.1
40-60 years	95.3	100.0	62.3	100.00	72.2	100.0	79.5
60- plus	95.0	100.0	66.7	--	83.3	--	83.7
Listening to FM radio							
Male	94.3	84.2	74.2	100.0	77.5	100.0	83.4
Female	95.5	85.2	67.2	100.0	76.2	100.0	79.3
Listening to FM radio							
Illiterate	100.0	83.3	47.9	--	47.6	0.0 (0)	56.2
Literate	93.8	73.5	64.9	100.0	79.3	100.0	73.1
6-9 grades	93.9	100.0	82.2	100.0	84.0	--	87.5
SLC	96.8	100.0	89.5	100.0	100.0	100.0	95.7
College	94.4	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	96.6
Listening to FM radio							
Farmer	95.5	83.9	61.5	100.0	61.9	0.0	71.6
Student	96.2	100.0	84.6	100.0	94.4	100.0	91.3
Others	92.8	80.0	84.8	100.0	83.3	88.9	88.6
Total	94.9	84.6	70.3	100.0	75.0	81.8	80.8
Watching TV							
Village	73.5	63.3	27.3	88.9	32.9	0.00	41.3
City	88.7	85.7	72.2	89.5	90.9	88.9	86.9
Total	81.0	70.8	30.0	89.3	40.5	72.7	53.1

Source: Baseline Audience Survey of Community Radio Madanpokhara, 2004

Almost all (94.3%) of the respondents in the city listened to FM radio whereas 76.0 percent of their counterparts in the villages did. Overall, about 90 percent listened to a radio whereas only 80.8 percent listened to a FM radio. The gap could be because the access to FM radio was 10 percent lower than the access to a general radio.

Listening to the radio was universal (100.0%) in the city and this was true for the respondents from all the caste/ethnic groups. All the respondents from Newar families living in villages and in the city listened to the radio. In villages, almost 95 percent of the Brahmin respondents followed by 88.6 percent of the Chhetri respondents and a relatively lower percent of the respondents from Magar (84.7%) and lower-cast families (80.8%) reported listening to a radio.

Similarly, 80.8 percent of the respondents listened to *Community Radio Madanpokhara* (CRM). Higher than 94 percent of the respondents in the city listened to CRM whereas 76 percent of their counterparts in villages did. The percent of respondents listening to CRM from different caste/ethnic groups was different. All the Newar respondents listened to CRM followed by Brahmin (94.9%) and Chhetri (84.6%). A relatively lower percent of the respondents from the lower-cast families (75.0%) and Magar (70.3%) listened to CRM.

All the respondents from Newar families living in villages and in the city listened to CRM. Similarly, listening to CRM was not significantly different among the Brahmin respondents living in the city (92.8%) and those living in villages (96.9%). Except in Brahmin families, listening to CRM was higher in the city than in villages. Furthermore, listening to CRM depended on largely where the respondents from Magars and lower-cast families lived. Higher than 94 percent of Magar respondents in the city listened to CRM whereas only about 69 percent of their counterparts in villages did. Similarly, all the respondents from lower-cast families in the city listened to CRM whereas only about 71 percent of their counterparts in villages did.

Listening to *Community Radio Madanpokhara* largely depended on the family owning a radio set with FM band. Higher than 91 percent of the respondents from families owning a radio set with FM band listened to CRM. However, 45.5 percent of the respondents without a FM radio set in the family also reported listening to *Community Radio Madanpokhara*. Furthermore, all the respondents from Newar families owing a FM radio listened to CRM, followed by 97.1 percent of the Brahmin and 95.8 percent of the Chhetri respondents. A relatively higher percent (75.0%) of the Brahmin respondents from families without a FM radio set also listened to CRM. A relatively lower percent of the respondents from Magar families with and without a FM radio set listened to CRM.

Listening to *Community Radio Madanpokhara* did not depend much on the respondents' age. However, a relatively higher percent of younger and older respondents listened to CRM than the respondents from other age groups. The age of the respondents from Brahmin and Newar families did not have significant effect on their listening to CRM. However, a relatively higher percent of the older Chhetri respondents listened to CRM than the younger ones.

Similarly, listening to CRM was not different between the male and female respondents from different caste/ethnic groups except for Magars. Higher than 74 percent

of the male Magar respondents listened to CRM as compared to only 67.2 percent of their female counterparts.

Overall, listening to *Community Radio Madanpokhara* varied according to the respondents' educational level. Almost 97 percent of the respondents with some college education listened to CRM as compared to only 56.2 percent of the illiterate respondents. The educational level of the Brahmin and Newar respondents did not have much effect on their listening to CRM. However, a relatively higher percent of Chhetri, Magar and lower-cast respondents with a higher level of educational level listened to CRM than those with a lower level of education.

Listening to CRM varied from 71.6 percent among farmers to 91.3 percent among students. However, Brahmin and Newar respondents' occupation did not have much effect on their listening to CRM. All the Newar respondents irrespective of their occupation listened to CRM. Brahmin farmers listened to CRM in an almost equal proportion as Brahmin students did. However, a relatively higher percent of Chhetri, Magar and lower-cast students listened to CRM than farmers from these ethnic origins.

In the survey area, 53.1 percent of the respondents watched TV. Almost 87 percent of the respondents in the city watched TV whereas only 41.3 percent of their counterparts in villages did. Examining the data according to the respondents' caste/ethnic origin, the percent of respondents watching TV was different. A high percent of the Newar (89.3%), followed by Brahmin (81.0%) and Chhetri (70.8%) respondents, watched TV. A relatively lower percent of the respondents from lower-cast families (40.5%) and of Magar (30.0%) watched TV.

Preference to radio stations

Among the respondent who reported listening to radio, the most often listened-to radio station was *Community Radio Madanpokhara* followed by Radio Nepal and Lumbini FM and less than 2 percent of the respondents reported other radio stations (All India Radio, BBC) as the most often listened-to radio station. Radio Nepal is the state-owned and run radio station airing from its Kathmandu and a regional station in Pokhara whereas Lumbini FM is a cooperative owned community radio station in neighboring district Rupendehi in the southern plains. The findings suggested that only 15 percent of the respondents reported stations other than CRM as the stations they most often listened to.

Both villagers as well as people living in the city reported CRM as the most often listened -to radio station. In villages, Radio Nepal was the second most often listened-to radio station whereas it ranked third in the city. Lumbini FM, which broadcasts from Manigram in Rupendehi district in the south, aimed for people in the plains in the southern districts including Rupendehi, Kapilbastu and Nawalparasi and its reception is not good in the hilly districts like Palpa. In the city, Radio Nepal and Lumbini FM were listened-to equally often, and a relatively lower percent of the respondents in the city listened to Radio Nepal than their counterparts in the villages did. There was a huge difference in terms of the percentage of respondents reporting CRM as the most listened-to radio and those preferring Radio Nepal.

Table: 3
Most often listened-to radio stations as reported by the respondents living in the city in Palpa district, 2004

Radio Station	Place of residence		Total
	Village	City	
Community Radio Madanpokhara	83.1%	89.7%	85.0%
Radio Nepal	9.9	4.0	8.2
Lumbini FM	4.8	4.6	4.8
Others	2.1	1.7	1.9
Total	100.0 (433)	100.0 (175)	100.0 (608)

Source: Baseline Audience Survey of Community Radio Madanpokhara, 2004

Table: 4
Most often listened-to radio stations as reported by the respondents among different caste/ethnic groups in Palpa district, 2004

Radio Station	Caste/Ethnic origin					
	Brahmin	Chhetri	Magar	Newar	Lower-cast	Others
CRM	94.7%	93.3%	78.1%	75.0%	80.0%	88.9%
Radio Nepal	2.1	5.0	11.2	17.9	12.9	11.1
Lumbini FM	2.1	1.7	8.4	3.6	2.9	0.0
Others	1.1	0.0	2.4	3.6	4.2	0.0
Total	100.0 (190)	100.0 (60)	100.0 (251)	100.0 (28)	100.0 (70)	100.0 (9)

Source: Baseline Audience Survey of Community Radio Madanpokhara, 2004

The survey indicated differences among various caste/ethnic groups in terms of their most often listened-to radio station. The respondents from all the ethnic origin, who reported listening to a radio, reported CRM as the most often listened-to radio station. However, this ranged the highest among Brahmin (94.7%) to the lowest among Newars (75.0%). Interestingly, a relatively higher proportion of the respondents from Newar, Magar and lower-cast families reported Radio Nepal as the most often listened-to radio station.

Program preference

*Kayakiran*² was the best program for the highest percent of the respondents in villages as well as in the city. This program is broadcast everyday from 6:30 am to 7:00 am, before the national news from Radio Nepal's central broadcasting. Produced and broadcast by Communication Corner in Kathmandu Valley, *Kayakiran* includes the major news stories published in Kathmandu's elite newspapers. Communication Corner broadcasts *Kayakiran* through several FM radio stations using a telephone hybrid.

Thus, listeners of CRM get news published in different newspapers in Kathmandu before the people in Kathmandu do. A very high percent (34.3%) of the respondents in

the city considered *Kayakiran* as the best program whereas only about 14 percent of their counterparts in villages did. Similarly, the popular programs in the villages were *Kayakiran* (14.2%), *Local Activities* (10.2%) *Lok Bhaka* (7.8%), *Jeevan ka Goretoma* (5.6%) and *Saitaka Bela* (4%) and *Kanung Lam* (4%).

Table: 5
The best radio programs by the respondents living in the city and villages in Palpa district, 2004

Best radio programs	Place of residence		Total
	Villages	City	
<i>Kayakiran</i>	14.2	34.3	19.4
<i>Local Activities</i>	10.2	2.3	8.1
<i>Lok Bhaka</i>	7.8	2.3	6.4
<i>Jeevan ka Goretoma</i>	5.6	6.9	5.9
<i>Saitaka Bela</i>	4.0	14.3	6.7
<i>Kanung Lam</i>	4.0	1.1	3.3
News	3.6	8.6	4.9
Other programs	22.2	13.1	19.8
Programs from other than CRM	8.4	5.7	7.7
Didn't listen to/no response	20.0	11.4	17.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Baseline Audience Survey of Community Radio Madanpokhara, 2004

Sthaniya Gatibidhi [Local Activities] was the second best program (10.2%) for the respondents in villages whereas it was ranked 5th by their counterparts in the city. This program is all about the local activities of the community and it is broadcast everyday from 7.15 am to 7:30 am and 6:30 pm to 6:45 pm.

Saitaka Bela [an auspicious time] was considered the second best program (14.3%) in the city whereas it was ranked 5th in villages. The program is broadcast everyday from 9:15 to 10:00 in the morning. This is a participatory program where listeners participate in a live program through a telephone line. Since phone is not easily accessible in villages, listeners in the city receive more chances to participate in the program.

Lok Bhaka [folk songs] was the third best program (7.8%) for the respondents in villages whereas it was eight in the list of best programs for the respondents in the city. The program is broadcast from 6:00 to 6:30 pm on Sunday, Monday, Thursday and Friday and from 5:30 to 6:00 pm on Monday as well.

Jeevan ka Goretoma [in the path of life] was 4th best program for the respondents in villages as well as in the city. The program is broadcast from 8:30 to 9:00 pm on Sundays and Wednesdays. Almost 7 percent of the respondents in villages and 5.6% of their counterparts in the city considered the program as the best. This program includes stories with songs.

Kanung Lam [Magar program] was the best program for 4.0% of the respondents in villages. All the respondents who favored the program were Magars (not shown in table). The program is broadcast on Sundays from 5:30 to 6:00 pm. This is the only program in Magar language.

All the caste/ethnic groups, except the respondents from the lower-cast families, considered *Kayakiran* as the best program. Almost 30 percent of Brahmin respondents considered *Kayakiran* as the best program whereas only 8.3 percent of the respondents from the lower-cast families considered the program as the best. Among the lower-cast families, almost 17 percent considered the program *Local Activities* as the best program.

Among Brahmin respondents, 29.7 percent considered *Kayakiran* as the best program, followed by 13.3 percent who considered *Saitaka Bela* as the best program. For Chhetri respondents, *Kayakiran* (23.1%) followed by *Local Activities* (20.0%), and news (12.3%) were the best programs. The Magar language program *Kanung Lam* (7.5%) and *Lok Bhaka* (7.5%) were the popular programs after *Kayakiran* among Magar respondents.

Table: 6
The best radio programs by the respondents from different caste/ethnic groups in Palpa district, 2004

Best radio program	Caste/Ethnic groups						Total
	Brahmin	Chhetri	Magar	Newar	Lower cast	Others	
<i>Kayakiran</i>	29.7	23.1	14.0	28.6	8.3	18.2	19.4
<i>Local Activities</i>	5.6	20.0	5.5	3.6	16.7	0.0	8.1
<i>Lok Bhaka</i>	3.6	6.2	7.5	7.1	9.5	0.0	6.4
<i>Jeevan ka Goretoma</i>	6.7	4.6	6.8	3.6	3.6	0.0	5.9
<i>Saitaka Bela</i>	13.3	4.6	2.4	17.9	4.8	0.0	6.7
<i>Kanung Lam</i>	0.0	0.0	7.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.3
News	4.1	12.3	4.4	3.6	3.6	9.1	4.9
Other programs	21.1	15.4	21.2	7.0	20.2	17.3	19.8
Other than CRM	7.2	0.0	9.2	10.7	8.3	9.9	7.7
Didn't listen to/no response	8.7	13.8	21.5	17.9	25.0	45.5	17.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Baseline Audience Survey of Community Radio Madanpokhara, 2004

Kayakiran, *Local Activities* and News are news related programs. A high percent (55.4%) of the Chhetri respondents favored news-related programs whereas only 23.9 percent of the Magar respondents did so. More than 39 percent of Brahmin and 35.8 percent of Newar respondents favored the news-related programs.

Discussion

Increasing access to radio

Community Radio Madanpokhara has increased the access to information among the rural masses in its broadcast area. There is no doubt that the percent of families owning a radio set has been increasing every year both before and after the establishment of CRM. However, the establishment of CRM, coupled with the availability of low-cost radio sets from China in the local market, drastically increased the number of families owing a

radio set. Radio no longer remained a luxury affordable only by rich – it has become a familiar commodity even for the general masses.

A study conducted in 1974, after a little over two decades of radio broadcasting in Nepal which had begun in 1951, estimated approximately 115,000 radio sets in Nepal, or 1 for every 100 individuals or 1 for every 18 families. Radio ownership was limited to the most wealthy, educated people because of the extremely high cost of radio sets. Furthermore, radio used to be a symbol of social and economical status. Even if a family possessed a radio, its access was often limited to the male family head. Turning on the radio and tuning it to a station was a prerogative of the male household-head or of other adult males in the family. Very few women owned radio set or had access to tuning them very often (“Radio listening,” 1974).

Later in 1997, Radio Nepal conducted a study interviewing 3038 individuals of 13 years or older in 15 out of 75 districts of Nepal. The study revealed that 60 percent of the households possessed a radio set. The same study estimated 1.7 million radio sets in Nepal. The survey indicated that a radio set was found mostly with people living in urban areas, having jobs, as well as with rich people in other parts of the country (Maung & Ghimire, 1997).

Similarly, the national census 2001 – the latest census in Nepal – indicated that only half (53.1%) of the households in Nepal had access to radio, whereas TV was limited to only 22.5 percent of the households. Overall, 41.3 percent of the households had access to neither a radio nor a TV. Furthermore, the access to radio and television was not homogeneous across the region. Almost two-thirds (64.7%) of people in the urban areas had access to radio whereas only half (50.9%) of their counterparts in the rural area had access to it. The census data has revealed the great divide in terms of access to television between people in cities (54.9%) and villages (16.4%) in Nepal. Almost one-fourth (24.0%) of people in cities and almost half (44.5%) of the people in villages did not have access to either radio or television (CBS, 2004).

Table: 7
Percentage of households having radio and TV facility in different years in Nepal

Year	Source	Place of residence				Total	
		Urban		Rural		Radio	TV
		Radio	TV	Radio	TV		
1974	Radio Nepal					5.6%	
1991	NFHS	67.2	38.9	29.2	1.2	31.7	3.7
1996	NDHS	59.7	42.6	34.2	3.1	36.5	6.6
1997	Radio Nepal					60.0	
2000	BCHIMES	71.0	55.4	46.6	7.8	49.7	13.9
2001	CENSUS	64.7	54.9	50.9	16.4	53.1	22.5

There has been increase in access to radio in rural areas over the years. However, data does not indicate a consistent pattern. The 1991 NFHS (Nepal Family Planning and Health Status) survey indicated that 31.7 percent of people in Nepal had access to radio whereas the access to TV was only 3.7 percent. The 1996 NDHS (Nepal Demographic and Health Status) survey indicated that the access to radio had increased to 36.5 percent

and to TV to 6.6 percent. Radio Nepal's own survey in 1997 revealed that 60 percent of the households had a radio set. However, the recent census of 2001 indicated that the access to radio was 53.1 percent and to TV 22.5 percent (CBS, 2004).

In Palpa, no study has been conducted to gauge the size of radio listeners in the district as a whole. Wilmore (1995) conducted a survey in Tansen in October 1995. The sample included 6 percent of the total number of 3211 households in the municipal area that yielded 195 interviews. In the study, a little over 72 percent of the respondents said that their family owned a television set. In this study, 70.9 percent of the respondents from the city reported their family owning a TV set (See Table 1).

This present study indicated that more than 86 percent of the families in the study area owned a radio set. Besides, more than 77 percent of the respondents reported owning a radio set with FM reception. FM radio is a relatively new phenomenon in Nepal and the radio sets in Nepal used to be largely with Short Wave and Medium Wave reception capabilities and rarely with Frequency Modulation (FM) reception. FM radio was unknown to people in Palpa before CRM started broadcasting in 2000. Even in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, FM radio became familiar only during the popular uprising for democracy in 1990 when affluent students learnt that they could listen to police communication over FM radio and direct their movement accordingly. The number of families owning a radio set, especially the number of families owning a radio set with FM reception, in the CRM's broadcast area is high and can be attributed to CRM broadcast.

Moving towards a local radio

Radio Nepal's 1997 survey estimated that about 0.4 million of people listened to radio on a daily basis. The study revealed that 28 percent of the respondents did not listen to radio whereas 13 percent listened to it but not to Radio Nepal. Among those who did not have a radio set, 56 percent of them did not listen to radio. Other non-listeners included non-Nepali speakers (50%) and the illiterate (44%). Similarly, 43 percent of village farmers and the poor and homeless people also did not listen to radio (Maung & Ghimire, 1997).

This present study shows that a very high percent of the respondents, who reported listening to a radio, mentioned CRM as the most often listened-to radio station as compared to the government-run Radio Nepal. An increasing number of people in the area are tuning in to their community radio. The presence of a community radio with programs geared towards local issues has been attracting new listeners and many listeners of the state-run radio station are switching over to tuning to community radio stations. This clearly indicates that the public favors local radio stations to the state-run station wherever they are available. The 1997 study indicated that 44 percent of the respondents without a radio set listened to radio and the present study also demonstrates this phenomenon, although to a lesser extent. This is because people in Nepal listen to radio even at a neighbors' place or gather around local teashops or newspaper stalls and listen to radio.

Listeners' taste

A national study of radio listening patterns in Nepal back in 1974 had revealed that informational programs such as news and agricultural programs were the most popular radio programs. The second most popular was educational programs, not the entertainment programs ("Radio listening," 1974: 98).

A study in Palpa district in 2000 revealed that most of the uneducated people listened to entertainment programs whereas most of the literate people listened to news. Farmers tended to listen to the agriculture programs. However, the local farmers found the programs irrelevant because the centrally produced agricultural programs were not related to either the cultivation or the harvesting time due to climate variations in different parts of the country. Furthermore, Radio Nepal's regional broadcast from Pokhara was neither popular nor effective because of a heavy bias towards Pokhara. People turned off their radio sets or tuned in to another station when Radio Nepal's regional broadcast began. The listeners had expressed a desire to have their own news and other programs. All India Radio could be heard clearly, and some people listened to it. In some parts of the district (Bauhaus and Pokharathok VDCs, for example) Kantipur FM from Kathmandu could be heard. People, mostly those who were educated and interested in news, listened to the BBC Nepali and Hindi programs as well as to the Voice of America. For them Radio Nepal's news coverage was inadequate (IIDS, 2000).

The study of IIDS (2000) was based on the data collected using group discussion among the reporters. Thus, the study provided the reporters' perception about the listeners. The study revealed that the highest percent (25.2%) of the listeners listened to entertainment programs followed by news (23.2%) and agricultural programs (21.5%). The proportion of listeners tuning to other programs was less than 10 percent: health (9.9%), human rights (8.3%), awareness programs (6.6%) and good governance (4.9%).

The present study also demonstrates similarities to some extent. People in the city favor news-oriented programs like *Kayakiran* whereas listeners in villages prefer *Local Activities* (local news) and entertainment programs. Among entertainment programs, listeners in the city favor the participatory programs like *Saita ka Bela* where they can participate through telephone whereas such programs are less attractive to villagers who do not have access to telephone services. As one resident in Tansen, Palpa put it, "I wake up early in the morning and tune in to CRM to listen to *Kayakiran*. By the time I go to the bathroom, I already know about the main news as well as the coverage of main newspapers in Kathmandu. I do not have to wait the whole day for newspapers to arrive from Kathmandu to know what has been covered in the day's newspapers." In fact, listeners of CRM and other FM radio stations that carry *Kayakiran* know the content of newspapers published from Kathmandu before their counterparts in Kathmandu read them.

Summary and Conclusions

In summary, media use (listening to radio and watching television) was not homogeneous. Listening to the radio was universal in the city whereas almost 15 percent of the people in villages reported not listening to a radio. Similarly, a relatively higher proportion of the respondents in the city listened to FM radio as compared to their counterparts in the villages. This gap could be because the access to FM radio was 10 percent lower in villages than in the city.

The findings suggest that a high percent of families (87%) own a radio set in the CRM's broadcast area. The percent of families possessing a radio set with FM reception was also found to be very high (77%). Although the percent of families owning at least one FM radio varied in the city and in the villages, the difference was not much. About 85 percent respondents in the city reported having at least one FM radio set in his or her family as compared to less than 75 percent of their counterparts in villages. This indicates that one fourth of the families in villages still do not have a FM radio set. Besides listening to radio at a neighbors' place or at a teashop or at a newspaper stall, these families do not have the means to listen to their local radio station. These – one-fourth of the rural people – are the most marginalized sections of the population. Such groups of people are supposed to be the target-audiences of community radio stations, providing them access to information and a voice and medium for participation. In light of the study where one-fourth of families still lack a radio set, the task of providing information to the least advantageous of families becomes very difficult.

Radio Nepal's study indicated that more than half of the non-owners of radio listened to the radio at least twice a week, usually at a local shop or at a friend's house ("Radio listening," 1974). Similarly, a higher percentage of respondents reported listening to the radio and watching TV than the percent of families having access to these media. This was because people who did not own these media also listened to radio or watched TV at a neighbors' place or they did so at teashops or at a stationary shop. More than 7 percent of the respondents reported listening to radio either at a shop or at a neighbor's place.

The findings indicated different levels of listening to a radio (both general and FM radio) among the different caste/ethnic groups. Listening to both types of radios was universal among Newar families who generally live in the city whereas it was the lowest in the marginalized groups of people.

Overall, the presence of CRM has increased the number of families owing a radio set with FM reception and a very large proportion of the listeners listen to CRM very often as compared to how often they listen to the state-run Radio Nepal. Four more radio stations went on air since the study was carried out. Two of the newly opened radio stations are commercial whereas the other two stations are community radio stations. This present study will provide a baseline for future studies in the region.

Community Radio Madanpokhara has been successful in term of providing access to information in its broadcast area. However, one-fourth of the families are still without a radio set to listen to FM radio. CRM, which aims to provide a voice to the voiceless and

to provide necessary and relevant information to the marginalized section of the population, has challenges achieving its objectives.

This paper is based on the paper that received first place on the 51st Annual Convention of Broadcast Education Association, International Division's Debut paper competition, 2006.

Endnotes

- ¹ VDC is the smallest administrative unit in the rural setting. There are 4000 VDCs in Nepal. A municipality is the lowest administrative unit in urban areas. There are 56 municipalities in the 75 districts of Nepal.
- ² *Kayakiran* – news and views program with news from the prominent newspapers from Kathmandu. This program was stopped because the king's government (Feb.1, 2005 to April 26, 2006) had shut down Communication Corner, an independent media organization producing and broadcasting programs through several FM radio stations. Communication Corner resumed its operation after the restoration of democracy on April 26, 2006.
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